

MEDIA ADVISORY

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Preliminary Data from New York City Show Menu Labels Impact Food Purchases

Calories Purchased Declined at Nine Chains, Significantly at Four

The mean number of calories purchased per customer decreased at nine fast-food or coffee chains and four of these decreases, at McDonald's, Au Bon Pain, KFC and Starbucks, were statistically significant. According to preliminary data presented today at the annual meeting of the Obesity Society in Washington, D.C. Customers at New York City fast-food who said they saw and acted on posted calorie information purchased 106 fewer calories than those who did not notice or did not use the information,

Researchers from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) conducted the study to examine the impact of city-wide menu labeling laws which went into effect in March 2008. They surveyed more than 10,000 customers at 275 locations of 13 different fast-food and coffee chains throughout the city in the spring of 2007 and over 12,000 in 2009, nearly a year after the requirements began.

In addition to the decrease in calories purchased, researchers also found:

- Just over half (56 percent) of fast-food customers in New York City reported seeing the calorie information in the spring of 2009, an increase from just under 8 percent in 2007, when just Subway restaurants posted such information for a few menu items.
- The number of calories purchased at Subway increased significantly, likely because the percentage of customers purchasing 12-inch sandwiches rose from 28 percent to 73 percent during the study period. This rise occurred at the same time as Subway was conducting its "\$5 Foot-long" advertising campaign, suggesting that effects of calorie labeling may be overcome by intensive marketing of large portion sizes.

An earlier New York University (NYU) study of the city's menu labeling requirements showed menu labels may have increased awareness of calorie content, but did not decrease the number of calories purchased in lower-income and minority neighborhoods. This new study was designed to be more representative of the city and used a random sample of chain locations. It also had a larger sample size and covered a longer period of time. Preliminary results show decreases at most chains, but while calories purchased declined significantly at coffee chains, there was not an overall decrease in total calories purchased at lunch chains.

"These results are exciting new findings suggesting that more consumers are seeing and using calorie information, and that calories have declined in some of the City's largest chains," said Lynn Silver, assistant commissioner of the Bureau of Chronic Disease Prevention and Control in the DOHMH. "Dietary change is likely to come gradually; it will start with consumers interested in making informed,

healthy eating decisions and we hope industry will respond by offering more healthier choices and appropriate portion sizes.”

Both the NYU study and the DOHMH study were funded by *Healthy Eating Research*, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. A comprehensive analysis on menu labeling is available at: www.healthyeatingresearch.org.

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